

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

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**Listening to History's Rhyme:  
Preparing the United States Army for Future Irregular Warfare**

by

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## **Abstract**

The United States Army will likely be called upon to fight another irregular war much sooner than many leaders care to admit. Limited resources and personnel mean the Army must ensure it can fight conventional and irregular adversaries equally well from the outset of any operation. This paper argues that general-purpose Army forces have an important role in future irregular warfare, regardless of any contrary political or institutional desires. It discusses strategic inconsistencies affecting the Army's role in future irregular warfare and ability to prepare for these conflicts. The paper then describes anticipated trends shaping the future operating environment and character of irregular threats. A case study of 2013 events in Mali illustrates the trends, character, and likelihood of irregular conflict. Finally, the paper concludes by recommending that the US Army should expand irregular warfare instruction in professional military education courses, organize Irregular Warfare Brigades within each division, partner with special operations forces to conduct extensive security force assistance missions, and work with the US Air Force to prioritize airlift and foreign internal defense.

## Contents

Disclaimer .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Introduction .....	1
Strategic Inconsistency .....	3
Character of the Future Operating Environment .....	10
Inconsistent Globalization .....	11
Divergent Demographics .....	12
Changing Geopolitical Landscape .....	13
Non-state Actors .....	14
Future Threat of Irregular Warfare .....	15
The Future Starts Today .....	18
Preparing the Force .....	24
Education .....	25
Organization .....	29
Mission .....	36
Mobility .....	44
Conclusion .....	48

## Introduction

*“Although the defense budget is under pressure, clear thinking about war costs nothing.” – H. R. McMaster*

The United States (US) has an extensive history fighting irregular conflicts and the Army should expect to participate in many more. In fact, the Army will likely be called upon much sooner than many leaders care to admit. However, instead of preparing, senior civilian and military leaders seem committed to avoiding future irregular wars, particularly large-scale stability and reconstruction operations.<sup>1</sup> Trends over the past few decades show a shift from conventional to irregular wars, yet current strategies emphasize retention of only a limited irregular warfare capacity. This continues the US trend of failing to learn from the past and applying wishful thinking about the future – a trend that may affect America’s ability to respond to future contingencies.<sup>2</sup> The US Army must retain and enhance its irregular warfare capabilities despite shrinking budgets and the conclusion of major military operations in Afghanistan. It may not be able to recapitalize war-worn equipment or retain large numbers of personnel, but the Army cannot afford to forget hard-won lessons or let irregular warfare skills atrophy.

The Chief of Staff of the Army and the commanders of US Army Forces and Training and Doctrine Commands have a strategic opportunity to posture the Army for success on future battlefields by organizing and preparing for likely irregular conflict scenarios. These leaders are committed to ensuring future success, but their efforts are not going far enough to address how the Army will succeed in future irregular wars. Counterinsurgency may currently be politically polarizing, but that does not mean the Army will not undertake similar operations in the future.<sup>3</sup> The complexity of the future operating environment and character of likely threats indicate the US Army must break free of its historic large war paradigm. World War I established the supremacy of firepower, World War II demonstrated the value of mechanization, and the

opening battles in Afghanistan and Iraq showed what brute force and precision strikes could accomplish.<sup>4</sup> However, as the latter wars drug on, the Army spent blood and treasure relearning lessons taught in previous irregular wars. Limited resources and personnel mean the US Army must ensure it can fight conventional and irregular adversaries equally well from the outset of any operation.

Most US military interventions have been, and will continue to be, irregular conflicts that require general-purpose forces (GPF) to take the lead or support special operations forces (SOF). The Army cannot afford to organize, train, and equip the same ways it did in the past. It must anticipate and prepare for the recurrence of irregular wars. This is the best way for the US Army to overcome diverse challenges and succeed in this type of conflict.<sup>5</sup> This paper argues that conventional Army forces have an important role in future irregular warfare, regardless of any contrary political or institutional desires. It discusses strategic inconsistencies affecting the Army's role in future irregular warfare and ability to prepare for these conflicts. The paper then describes anticipated trends shaping the future operating environment and character of irregular threats. A case study of 2013 events in Mali illustrates the trends, character, and ongoing likelihood of irregular conflicts. Finally, the paper concludes by recommending how the US Army can prepare for future irregular challenges despite declining resources and force structures. It suggests that the Army should expand irregular warfare instruction in professional military education courses, organize an Irregular Warfare Brigade within each division, conduct extensive security force assistance with vital partner nations and under the auspices of regional alignment, and work with the US Air Force to prioritize and increase their capacity for airlift and foreign internal defense.

## Strategic Inconsistency

*“What we can afford least is to define the problem of future war as we would like it to be, and by doing so introduce into our defense vulnerabilities based on self-delusion.” – H. R. McMaster*

Senior Army leaders recognize a need to maintain irregular warfare capabilities, yet they seem unable to determine how because of the Department of Defense's (DOD) future-oriented threat assessment process. This process emphasizes the most dangerous, rather than most likely, threats. DOD planners mitigate future uncertainty by identifying potential threats and areas in which the military is unprepared. This assessment shapes missions and influences all force structure decisions. It is a rational way to determine threats and identify potential DOD responses, but it has two main flaws. First, the search for new threats often leads planners to identify other nations, instead of non-state actors, as likely adversaries because nations are easier to assess. This may result in planners inflating the magnitude of a threat or exaggerating its potential. The current DOD focus on China, Iran, and North Korea exemplify this flaw. While groups in Nigeria, Somalia, and Syria create lawlessness and take advantage of ungoverned spaces to spread radical ideologies, DOD planners focus on space programs, cyber operations, and countering anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) challenges.

Second, the range of potential threats presents a confusing array of challenges that make it extremely difficult for planners to prioritize missions. Senior leaders and planners often focus on the most dangerous threats instead of the most likely, which typically results in developing technologically advanced, conventional solutions to potential rivals, options poorly-suited for irregular conflict. For instance, Army General Robert Cone, the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) commander, recently announced the service is studying robot technologies for uses in combat, transportation, and surveillance. These technologies might help fight conventional adversaries on contiguous battlefields with clear boundaries, but they offer

limited benefits for irregular wars fought among indigenous populations. The Army's development of a 70-ton ground combat vehicle and acquisition of additional M109A6 Paladin self-propelled howitzers also represents a conventional bias. Irregular adversaries are less susceptible to advanced technology and standoff capabilities. Conflicts in nations with limited transportation infrastructure, a lack of cultural understanding, or an insufficient amount of power projection assets are as much forms of A2/AD as a state adversary with advanced anti-ship missiles. These facts may be overlooked because of the current DOD threat modeling.

An alternative way of assessing threats is to examine the past to identify the most common forms of conflict or frequently occurring threats then shaping forces accordingly. The advantage of looking at the past is the ability to integrate lessons learned to improve future performance. Rather than planning in a vacuum, the DOD could adjust existing plans and forces to a particular context; much like US combatant commands do with existing operation plans. For example, a review of the past two decades shows increasing frequency of US involvement in irregular conflict. Lessons learned in El Salvador, Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo should have influenced training, organizing, and planning for operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Even though leaders may prefer to avoid committing GPF to irregular conflicts, they may not have a choice. Accepting this fact and using it to guide future force decisions means implementing, as opposed to ignoring, lessons from Afghanistan and Iraq. The past twelve years demonstrated the importance of keeping US Army GPF prepared for irregular warfare. Unlike decisions made after the Vietnam War, recent conflicts should provide a model for shaping future forces.

The 2010 *National Security Strategy of the United States* affirms America's commitment to underwrite global security by focusing on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), deterrence, and irregular threats.<sup>6</sup> WMD proliferation is the most dangerous and



potentially existential threat facing the US, but the Army has a limited role in achieving non-proliferation objectives. Deterrence is also important given the impact of war in an increasingly interconnected world; yet, deterrence is difficult to measure and the Army's readiness to respond to challenges is its best contribution. The question is what capabilities and to what types of threats should the Army prepare to present a credible deterrent? In the past 236 years, the US participated in less than ten major conventional conflicts. Only two of them, the Civil War and Second World War, presented existential threats. Despite the limited number of conventional wars, the Army historically organizes, trains and equips to fight these kinds of conflicts. This tendency reflects an American way of war focusing on victory through battles of annihilation using technology and firepower to minimize casualties.<sup>7</sup>

This preferred way of war needs to change. Incidences of conventional war are declining and less destructive than at any point in the last 200 years.<sup>8</sup> Although nuclear weapon proliferation and inter-state conflict remain critical challenges for the US, irregular threats are the most likely challenge facing the Army. In fact, irregular warfare has been the dominant form of conflict throughout American history.<sup>9</sup> The past twenty years continued the historical trend of numerous irregular conflicts and infrequent conventional wars. Since 1990, the US participated in two conventional wars (i.e., the Gulf War and Operation Iraqi Freedom ground offensive) and nine irregular conflicts (i.e., Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Columbia, Afghanistan, post-invasion Iraq, the Horn of Africa, and the Philippines). Globalization and economic interdependence increase the difficulty of unilateral conventional conflict, but intra-state conflicts involving irregular forces continue to proliferate around the world.<sup>10</sup> This is particularly troubling because irregular US adversaries may have the strategic initiative in most conflicts despite the Army's unmatched tactical advantages.<sup>11</sup>

The *National Security Strategy* recognizes that irregular adversaries may have the initiative, so it calls for enhancing the military's capacity to defeat asymmetric irregular threats. The whole of government approach specifically prescribes rebalancing military forces to excel against irregular threats while maintaining responsiveness across the range of military operations.<sup>12</sup> This guidance implies that irregular conflict should remain one of the Army's priorities and appropriately weighted against conventional capabilities. However, the 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR) emphasizes state-based threats like Iran and North Korea, and relies upon technological advantages.<sup>13</sup> The QDR supports ongoing force reductions while prioritizing cyber, missile defense, space, and high-cost/high-technology options like the Joint Strike Fighter or stealth long-range bombers. These options leave the Army underequipped and undermanned to support joint contingency response operations or irregular conflict. A review of the 2014 QDR's force structure recommendations shows that the DOD is not rebalancing forces for the most likely threat despite acknowledging the likelihood of irregular conflict and proliferation of unconventional adversaries.

Many QDR recommendations reflect previously discussed flaws in the DOD's threat assessment methodology. For example, the US Air Force (USAF) is supposed to prioritize modernization of fifth-generation fighters and new stealth long-range bombers while reducing airlift, refueling assets, close air support, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets.<sup>14</sup> This tacitly directs the Air Force to focus on high-tech, state-based adversaries, since air superiority and stealth bombers are less useful in irregular conflicts than airlift and ISR. The QDR's Army force structure proposals focus on balancing the force by cutting personnel end strength even though the document directs the Army to be better prepared for full spectrum operations.<sup>15</sup> Although maintaining skills sets across the range of military operations is prudent,

it does not represent rebalanced capabilities. Additionally, reduced personnel will strain the Army's ability to adequately prepare for all the missions contained within the QDR. This seems to imply a preference for conventional forces and capabilities, since the QDR's description of a fiscally constrained environment suggests the Army may have to focus limited resources on the most dangerous threats, instead of the most likely. The 2014 QDR guidance to balance the force by cutting end strength may leave the Army unprepared for the future despite America's current inflection point.<sup>16</sup>

Instead of looking around the world where the US will likely face threats, national leaders simply shifted focus from the Middle East to Asia with the implication that China is America's biggest future challenge.<sup>17</sup> This shift, and subsequent development of Air-Sea Battle concepts, reflect a strong US preference for dealing with state-based threats. Current defense dialogue shows that the DOD will choose its preferred missions when faced with declining resources, instead of supporting capabilities to address less-preferred, but more likely, threats. Air Force Major General Charles Dunlap's 2006 comments, made during the height of a growing insurgency in Iraq, illustrate this senior leader tendency. Dunlap advocated eschewing irregular conflicts and focusing on air strikes, high-tech surveillance, and long-range bombing in order to fight quick wars at long-distance.<sup>18</sup> Events before, during, and after Major General Dunlap's comments belie their wisdom. The US may get to select when to fight, but it does not have the final vote on deciding how to fight a war. Trite though it may be, the enemy gets a vote. The DOD disregards this fact when it ignores the implications and likelihood of recurring irregular warfare.

What the senior leaders seem to fear most is an unfavorable world order, even though unacceptable disorder may be more threatening to US interests. An unfavorable world order is

the threat of a regional power irresponsibly using power (e.g., North Korea's launching of long-range ballistic missiles). A government's failure to control its people and resources is unacceptable disorder (e.g., Somalia's failed government and the expansion of terror groups into ungoverned territory).<sup>19</sup> National and defense policies currently focus on emerging regional powers and potential near-peer competitors. Force rebalancing focuses on enhancing air, space, cyber, and naval capabilities while reducing ground forces. These ideas reflect past patterns of post-conflict drawdown and mirror the late 1990s Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) concept. According to RMA proponents, advances in communication, information technology, and precision munitions provide the military full spectrum dominance against any enemy.<sup>20</sup>

The main issue with the RMA concept and its recent derivatives is that it confuses how the US prefers to fight with the reality of dynamic, adaptable enemies. Early operations in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrated America's unrivaled mobility and firepower, but later stages showed the limits of these assets in irregular conflicts.<sup>21</sup> Despite this evidence and contemporaneous Israeli and Russian examples, some leaders believe that small units armed with precision fires, advanced situational awareness, and integrated joint capabilities will always prevail.<sup>22</sup> The US Army, of all the services, should understand the inherent errors within RMA-related concepts reappearing in DOD strategies. During the past twelve years, the Army rediscovered the efficacy of low-tech solutions and working with partners to successfully achieve security objectives. However, the 2013 *Army Strategic Planning Guidance* seems to ignore these lessons. The guidance continues pre-2001 themes and parrots the role of superior technology and information systems in conflicts. Current Army guidance barely mentions low-tech solutions, security force assistance, or foreign internal defense. Instead of focusing on the development of individual soldier skills, leader initiative, and small-unit leadership, guidance

emphasizes transitioning from a counterinsurgency-focused force and reinvigorating conventional warfighting capabilities.<sup>23</sup> The 2013 guidance implies a preference for conventional warfare and a return to focusing on technological solutions applied to inherently human problems.

The US Army envisions a role in ten of the eleven primary missions outlined in DOD strategic guidance.<sup>24</sup> It plans to implement a concept called mission-tailoring to ensure units remain capable of meeting these missions. Mission-tailored units will be capable of supporting unified land operations while retaining capabilities for at least one other specified mission.<sup>25</sup> Long-term budget forecasts make it improbable that all Army units will be able to train equally for two or more missions as envisioned in the strategic guidance. Mission tailoring requires careful analysis at what echelons it may be most feasible – companies and battalions may work, but brigades and divisions may strain forecasted resources. Army guidance seems more concerned with preserving the force in the face of budget and force reductions instead of shaping what is left to respond to likely future threats. This instinct for force preservation may be a necessary counterweight to the current emphasis on expensive Air Force and Navy modernization programs and the Asia Pivot. However, the Army will be better served by prioritizing missions and identifying how to make remaining forces more effective given budgetary constraints.

The lack of mission prioritization distracts units and seems likely to ensure a mediocre force that can perform no mission well. Although the Army's strategic guidance is somewhat more realistic and less aspirational than national or DOD strategies, it is clearly risk-averse. It also fails to lay claim to the missions where the Army is most relevant and needed. To the strategy's credit, it focuses on disorder and working with weak states to manage unacceptable disorder.<sup>26</sup>

Despite this, the guidance fails to direct the organization to prepare for predominantly small-unit operations with partner militaries in remote locations. It stresses networking soldiers with enabling systems like ground-based robots and space assets.<sup>27</sup> Rather than focusing on the development of language capabilities, cultural knowledge, and counterinsurgency skills, the Army's strategy is to focus on technological overmatch.<sup>28</sup> Technological overmatch and networks work well against state-based adversaries, but they perform poorly against irregular threats. Now is the time to shape the force and prepare for a future operating environment that may make recent operations look relatively easy.

### **Character of the Future Operating Environment**

*"American forces must cope with the political and human dynamics of war in complex, uncertain environments." – H. R. McMaster*

Many of the trends likely to impact the future operating environment already influence current operations. Some of these trends are particularly relevant to the US Army and will challenge the organization's ability to operate according to historically preferred methods of warfare. How the US responds, and the Army's role, will be important factors in determining the trajectory of these trends.<sup>29</sup> The complexity and potential disruption from these trends require skillful application of all instruments of national power and nuanced military approaches. Technology proliferation will likely undergird future trends and increase the complexity of their impact. Some experts, like David Kilcullen, contend increasing population growth and urbanization will shape the future character of irregular warfare.<sup>30</sup> He points to the 2008 Mumbai attacks and uprisings in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt as archetypes of future irregular warfare.<sup>31</sup> Kilcullen notes that cities in weak or failing states may strain a local government's

administrative ability to provide services, thereby creating governance gaps in areas where the government does not control its territory.<sup>32</sup>

However, urbanization and urban insurgencies are not a new trend. Conflicts in Palestine, Cyprus, Algeria, Oman, and Somalia demonstrated urban aspects of insurgency.<sup>33</sup> There have been just as many insurgencies in sparsely populated, rural settings – Malaya, Kenya, Indonesia, Rhodesia, and Angola to name several.<sup>34</sup> The US Army's experience during the past decade serves as further evidence that it should next expect a particular setting for insurgency.

Afghanistan's insurgency was rural, while Iraq was predominantly urban. In both, insurgents used rural regions as staging areas in which to prepare and launch attacks into cities. The interplay between increasing urbanization and weakly governed rural regions indicates the Army will need to develop tactics that allow it to operate seamlessly in both environments. Rising populations, increasing urbanization, governance gaps, and the locations in which these patterns emerge may define the context of a conflict. However, they do not describe the general character of the operating environment in which the Army should expect to operate. Trends likely to define the character of the future operating environment include the effects of inconsistent globalization, divergent demographic patterns, changing geopolitical landscapes, and non-state actors challenging traditional governance structures.<sup>35</sup>

*Inconsistent Globalization.* Globalization is the mega-trend “so ubiquitous that it will substantially shape all the other major trends.”<sup>36</sup> It should continue for the foreseeable future and presents contradictory scenarios for the US in dealing with disruptive events. Experts predict a less westernized form of globalization as the global economic center of gravity shifts eastward.<sup>37</sup> However, they remain uncertain if Asian nations will use their economic dynamism to alter the status quo or if globalization will benefit already struggling nations. Despite this uncertainty, it

is possible that countries benefiting from economic, social, and technological advances will seek increased global influence by offering alternatives to US policies.

The unequal distribution of globalization's benefits may cause pervasive insecurity, as nations left behind become breeding grounds for humanitarian disasters, violence, terrorism and transnational criminal networks. In particular, Sub-Saharan Africa plays host to numerous challenges that may disrupt global stability.<sup>38</sup> The region already provides safe havens for terror groups like Al Shabab in Somalia, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Algeria, and Boko Haram in Nigeria. Countries may fuel regional insecurity if they react to threats by closing borders or restricting the flow of capital, people, and technology.<sup>39</sup> Globalization's impact on struggling states with weak governments, particularly those with ethnic or boundary disputes, may spark conflicts requiring US involvement.

*Divergent Demographics.* Experts predict worldwide population to increase to approximately nine billion people by 2035; however, growth will not occur equally in all regions.<sup>40</sup> Population trends show that industrialized countries are shrinking and getting older. Meanwhile, populations in developing nations are younger and continue to expand.<sup>41</sup> Almost all population growth is expected in developing countries, with the least developed nations almost doubling their populations by 2035.<sup>42</sup> These demographic patterns have national security implications and affect the readiness of military forces.

Migration from poor, populous countries to wealthy, aging ones will continue to increase as industrialized nations seek to replace aging workforces. However, these migrations may fuel internal turmoil and social conflict as countries struggle to integrate newcomers with different ethnicities, religions and willingness to assimilate. Large populations of unemployed youth may also fuel internal conflict in poor countries with weak or corrupt governments.<sup>43</sup> Demographic



aging in industrialized nations may cause military recruiting or retention issues. For instance, US lifestyles cause health issues that result in only 30% of 17-24 year olds being eligible for military service.<sup>44</sup> This obviously does not account for the willingness of eligible recruits to serve in the military.

*Changing Geopolitical Landscapes.* The changing geopolitical landscape began with the demise of the bi-polar Cold War era and appears to be accelerating. Rising powers may challenge US interests or compete to shape the global order. China and India present potential challenges to US hegemony since they emerged as regional powers with strong economies and military modernization programs.<sup>45</sup> Iran is attempting to exert regional influence and circumvent non-proliferation agreements. Although the US moved away from fighting a two-war strategy, the emerging landscape indicates that multiple, and possibly simultaneous, conventional and irregular challenges may occur around the world. This is increasingly apparent in Africa where the US has increasing strategic commercial, energy, and security interests.<sup>46</sup> Not only will increasing engagement involve the US in local or regional issues, it may drive instability in relationships with other nations like China, India, Russia, or Turkey which are also active in Africa.

The US faces a challenging geopolitical landscape containing a variety of challenges. Transformation of the Middle East continues to confound policy-makers and China is increasingly assertive in regional issues like territory disputes in the South China Sea. Iran's attempts to gain nuclear weapons undercut US regional security objectives in the Middle East. Nuclear-armed Pakistan suffers from internal insecurity and provides sanctuary for insurgents fighting US forces in Afghanistan. Although the US will likely remain dominant over rivals like

China, Iran, and North Korea, these countries may collaborate with non-state actors to challenge the US across all domains.<sup>47</sup>

*Non-state Actors.* Poverty reduction resulting from globalization, an increasing middle-class, greater educational attainment, and access to technology empowers individuals to make more demands on governments.<sup>48</sup> Non-state actors will continue to challenge governments by presenting disruptive threats or demanding reforms. This trend is evident in the increasing power of radical Islamist groups within an arc of instability from West Africa to Southeast Asia.<sup>49</sup> Groups with grievances may leverage access to technology to challenge governments or institutions. Access to advanced or disruptive technologies empowers non-state actors to commit violence with means formerly reserved for states.<sup>50</sup> Non-state actors, ranging from armed opposition groups, militias, crime syndicates, and terrorists increasingly challenge state-based institutions, which will continue into the foreseeable future.

Many experts point to Hezbollah's actions in the Levant to exemplify this trend, even as the group assumes more responsibilities and functions as a political party. AQIM in Algeria and Boko Haram in Nigeria represent radical groups challenging government control. Also in Nigeria, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force conducts criminal and terror activities like kidnappings and attacks on oil infrastructure that threaten regional security.<sup>51</sup> Mara Salvatrucha (i.e., MS 13) is a violent transnational criminal network descended from gangs in the US and operating throughout Central America. It is involved in smuggling, human trafficking, and there are reports that it met with Al Qaeda members interested in infiltrating the US-Mexico border.<sup>52</sup> These groups have command structures outside state control and use violence to achieve political objectives. Non-state actors' control of territory, distinct identities, and relationships with society will challenge state control.

## **Future Threat of Irregular Warfare**

*“History doesn’t repeat itself, but it does rhyme.” – Mark Twain*

History shows the US should expect weaker conventional adversaries like Iran and China to use irregular tactics or non-state proxies to complicate US security decision-making. Decreasing forward American presence and access to foreign military bases may also challenge contingency response. Globalization, changing demographics, and weak states in underdeveloped regions will continue to breed violent non-state actors. Instability engendered by these actors may cause or exploit internal conflicts requiring intervention in regions where the US has strategic interests. The complex convergence of globalization, demographics, changing geopolitical landscape, and role of non-state actors will likely challenge US force employment options. The Army must prepare for this, instead of believing it can choose its adversaries and how it will fight.

Adversaries will have an abundance of manpower from which to draw recruits, ability to leverage cultural and regional animosities, and the financial wherewithal to purchase advanced technologies that counter US military strengths. This scenario recently occurred during US efforts in Iraq, where Syria allowed foreign-fighters to stage and transit into the area of operations. Iran also provided technologies like explosively formed projectiles and other weapons that caused significant US casualties while complicating COIN efforts. Non-state actors may also try to negate the Army’s technological superiority by relying on commercially available communication technology and unmanned aerial systems, low-cost kinetic options like improvised explosive devices, light logistical footprints, and distributed command and control. These adversaries will also operate in areas like Africa and Central Asia where weak and failing states provide venues for transnational criminal networks, resource competition, ethnic strife, and unmitigated population growth.

Wars and the armies that fight them reflect the societies and contexts in which they occur, so the operating environment's changing character will influence future warfare. Based on ever-evolving trends, the US Army should prepare to counter threats that use highly dispersed and maneuverable elements favoring speed over mass, decreased reliance on centralized logistics support, non-linear and non-contiguous battle spaces, and blurred distinctions between military and civilian targets. This is not a new style of warfare. It merely reflects a continuation of irregular warfare tactics applied in current contexts. What is new, is that irregular warfare seems to be becoming the strategically preferred method of war instead of a tactic used by materially weak enemies.

The future irregular threat will likely contain groups seeking to achieve their political goals indirectly rather than directly fighting against fielded conventional forces. In other words, the future character of warfare will likely be irregular. Operation Desert Storm, the spectacular technological and tactical achievements during the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the display of airpower during the 2011 Libya strikes were demonstrable lessons that potential adversaries cannot win against the US using direct conventional means. Alternatively, American experiences during the insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq, Israeli military shortcomings during its 2006 fight against Hezbollah, and Russia's struggles in Chechnya confirm the efficacy of irregular tactics in protracted conflicts against conventional industrialized forces.

Adversaries are blending regular and irregular tactics to mitigate the Army's technological strength. Published descriptions of China's doctrine of Unrestricted Warfare<sup>53</sup> and Iran's Mosaic Defense<sup>54</sup> should warn Army planners that future operations will likely be irregular or contain significant irregular elements, even if the US is fighting a traditional state-based adversary. Britain's decades-long fight in Northern Ireland, US experiences in Somalia, Afghanistan, and

Iraq, Russia's wars in Chechnya, Israel's battles against Hezbollah, and French peacekeeping missions throughout Africa during the 2000s, all point to the future type of threat. Some authors, like Frank Hoffman and Peter Mansoor, refer to these future threats as engaging in hybrid warfare. According to Hoffman, "hybrid wars incorporate a range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder."<sup>55</sup> What makes hybrid wars so challenging is that different elements execute the various modes of warfare and are typically coordinated at various levels within the battle space to achieve synergistic effects.<sup>56</sup> However, whereas Hoffman's hybrid war concept mainly focuses on tactics – the different modes of warfare – the idea's true value is in helping to understand the character of future threats.

Peter Mansoor notes that the idea of hybrid war is a useful concept for thinking about war, but it is not new.<sup>57</sup> Examples of armies that blended conventional and irregular elements to confront adversaries include Athens and Sparta during the Peloponnesian War, France and Britain during the French and Indian War in America, the British in the Middle East during the First World War, the Soviets during World War II, and the recent US conflict in Iraq. Mansoor highlights that hybrid warfare requires political leaders to clearly understand their opponent and the level of commitment necessary to achieve strategic goals. Furthermore, military leaders must adjust existing doctrine and forces to account for the likely type of adversaries in a conflict.<sup>58</sup> Hybrid opponents will increasingly use conventional and irregular forces to counter US technological superiority and, as Hoffman described, work together to mitigate US advantages.

Army leaders need to understand the nature of hybrid threats, but the organization has failed to learn from past lessons and continues to classify adversaries as conventional or irregular, instead of as a mix of types described in China and Iran's strategies. The Army needs a variety

of assets to engage hybrid threats, and it cannot ignore one type of threat while engaging another. It must also be prepared to fight irregular conflicts effectively without going through a learning or adjustment period.<sup>59</sup> Future threats using hybrid warfare tactics will present the Army with a two-fold challenge by using conventional forces to concentrate power against vulnerable formations, while employing irregular forces to compel units to disperse in order to secure the battle space. This creates a conundrum for US Army leaders faced with having to decide between dispersing forces, which makes them susceptible to the enemy's conventional attacks, or ceding control of the countryside to irregular forces.<sup>60</sup> The declining force structure and resources envisioned in the 2014 QDR suggest that hybrid warfare will severely test a smaller force tasked with engaging in full spectrum operations.

### **The Future Starts Today**

*"It is always wise to look ahead, but difficult to look further than you can see." – Winston Churchill*

The 2013 French experience in Mali highlights trends of the future operating environment and character of irregular threats. It also suggests that the Army is unprepared to counter these threats in locations different from ones historically familiar or anticipated. Mali is a predominantly Muslim country with limited infrastructure, harsh terrain, ethnic tension, and a weak government that cannot fully control its hinterlands. The scope of challenges facing an outside force attempting to operate in Mali is arguably more daunting than in Afghanistan. Mali is roughly 1.2 million square kilometers, almost double the size of Afghanistan, and has 14.5 million inhabitants, less than half Afghanistan's population. Almost half of Mali's population is less than 15 years old with the average age being 15.8 years. The closest port to landlocked Mali is Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire more than 900 kilometers away and is not connected by a railroad. The

closest port with a railroad connection is Dakar, Senegal, more than 1,000 kilometers to the west. Whereas Afghanistan has 53 airports, 19 of which have paved runways, Mali only has 29. Only eight of these are paved. Mali has 18,563 kilometers of roads with less than 25% paved, half the total in Afghanistan and seven times less paved roadways.<sup>61</sup>

Like Afghanistan, Mali is a historically contested country buffeted by its past as part of the French colonial empire. Before French colonization, Mali was once part of a West African empire that controlled trade throughout the region and did not have strong political boundaries or ethnic identities.<sup>62</sup> France conquered Mali in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century but granted independence in 1960. Mali's government initially adopted Socialist policies and a Soviet orientation under single-party rule. By the late 1960s, Mali realigned itself with France. By the 1990s, Mali transitioned to multi-party, democratic rule.<sup>63</sup> Although France's relationship with Mali is largely economic, France maintains an active military role throughout its former West African colonies and participated in several peacekeeping missions throughout the region. Ongoing ethnic rivalries add to the complex legacy of Mali's colonial past.

The Tuaregs are a nomadic tribe of ethnic Berbers living throughout the trans-Sahara region in northern Mali and parts of Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, and Niger. Tuaregs fought an insurgency against the French from 1893 to 1917 and participated in at least three rebellions against the Malian government since 1960.<sup>64</sup> Nationalism, economic marginalization, and a lack of political representation fuel Tuareg grievances and ongoing conflict in Mali.<sup>65</sup> The latest rebellion started in 2011 in northern Mali where Tuaregs formed the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA).<sup>66</sup> MNLA leadership declared independence for the Tuareg-dominated northern regions of the country and joined forces with Ansar al Dine, a radicalized Tuareg group, and AQIM to fight Malian military forces.<sup>67</sup>

The nexus between nationalist ethnic, radical Islamist, and Al Qaeda-inspired terror groups has drawn increased US attention to Africa since 2001. AQIM, formerly known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), began operating in southern Algeria in the early 2000s and formally affiliated with Al Qaeda in 2007. In 2003, GSPC kidnapped 32 Western tourists who were subsequently released after Mali negotiated through Ansar al Dine and essentially granted GSPC immunity in Malian territory. AQIM has operated freely in Mali for ten years because of this deal. During this time, they exploited Tuareg ethnic tensions and economic grievances to attract recruits to AQIM's radical ideology. AQIM exploits Mali's weak borders to evade security forces and partners with transnational drug traffickers shipping drugs across the Sahel from South America to Europe. In exchange for escorting drug convoys and providing protection, AQIM receives money to purchase weapons and supplies, and it supplements this income with ransoms paid for kidnapped Westerners.<sup>68</sup>

In response to events like these, as well as the growing importance of Africa to US energy interests and competition with China on the continent, the US established the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2008.<sup>69</sup> The US also launched Operation Enduring Freedom – Trans Sahara (OEF-TS) – the government's third priority counterterrorism mission – to form security cooperation relationships that strengthen partner capacity in ten countries.<sup>70</sup> The mission complements Operation Enduring Freedom – Horn of Africa in the eastern part of Africa and establishes a US presence across the entire trans-Sahara, from Djibouti to the Gulf of Guinea. In June 2012, the US President released the *US Strategy Towards Sub-Saharan Africa*, which contains four pillars that guide America's involvement in the region: 1) strengthen democratic institutions; 2) spur economic growth; 3) advance peace and security; and 4) promote opportunity.<sup>71</sup>



AFRICOM conducts three major training exercises with West African nations under the auspices of OEF-TS – Flintlock, Atlas Accord, and African Lion – and in support of America’s Sub-Saharan strategy. African Lion is the largest exercise, and it is conducted with Morocco to train its forces on logistics, combined arms maneuver, and other skills.<sup>72</sup> Atlas Accord is a new exercise started in 2012 to provide classroom and field training for Malian forces on logistics and command and control.<sup>73</sup> Flintlock is an annual exercise started in 1998 that trains West African nations on leadership, operations, logistics, and other skills.<sup>74</sup> Flintlock exercises are particularly relevant because they work directly with the militaries most affected by transnational smuggling and terror groups like AQIM. These three exercises are important, but they do not represent a high level of sustained US commitment or investment in the region.

In January 2012, Tuareg insurgent groups in Mali’s northern desert region launched another round of fighting for independence from the Malian government. Mali’s president failed to address the situation, which motivated a March 2012 coup launched by Malian Army officers.<sup>75</sup> Insurgents took advantage of the confusion and captured northern Mali’s three largest cities in three days.<sup>76</sup> Islamist groups backing the Tuareg insurgents began imposing Sharia law in the newly declared independent zone. This caused an internal division within the insurgency, but Islamist groups, including AQIM, won the contest and claimed control of the territory.<sup>77</sup> By January 2013, the Malian government requested French assistance to oust the Islamists and regain control of the northern territories. France and members of the African Union intervened and successfully assisted the Malian Army retake the lost territory.<sup>78</sup> Conflict continues, but the situation offers several insights about the future operating environment and irregular threat, as well as how the US Army should prepare for the future.

The situation in Mali illustrates all of the trends influencing the character of the future operating environment. Mali is a poor country that is not benefiting from globalization. Approximately one-third of its population is unemployed and lives below the poverty line. Mali's gross domestic product (GDP) is only \$10.3 billion and is shrinking annually by 1.3%. This makes Mali one of the 25 poorest countries in the world – even Afghanistan is richer with a GDP of \$19.9 billion and 10.2% growth.<sup>79</sup> Mali is also experiencing divergent population growth, with 48% of its population younger than 15 and only 3% older than 65. The geopolitical landscape also affects Mali. Internally, Mali has over 12,000 refugees escaping turmoil in neighboring Mauritania and more than 350,000 inhabitants displaced by the Tuareg revolt in the north.<sup>80</sup> Externally, conflict in Cote d'Ivoire disrupted operations at its main port, which handles over 70% of Malian exports. The rebellion also showed Mali's inability to control its territory, and the Tuareg revolt and exploitation by Islamist forces highlights the role of non-state actors challenging governance in weak states.

Tuareg insurgents returned to begin their latest revolt after fighting for former dictator Muammar Qaddafi during the 2011 Libyan civil war.<sup>81</sup> The insurgents returned with money, weapons, and better training to challenge the poorly equipped Malian Army. Islamist forces, including AQIM, were already operating in West Africa for several years and used the vast expanse of weakly controlled territory to launch attacks throughout the region.<sup>82</sup> Although the Tuaregs and Islamists had different agendas, their decision to cooperate highlights a pattern of irregular threats collaborating to achieve common goals. This is similar to the Taliban-Al Qaeda-Haqqani Network nexus in Afghanistan.<sup>83</sup> The fact that Tuaregs and Islamists benefited from cross-border sanctuaries in Libya and Algeria shows the impact of weak state control of national boundaries. The area has been described in the banana theory, named because of the

banana-shaped route Al Qaeda-inspired terrorists traveled from Central Asia, across the Horn of Africa through sub-Saharan Africa into the Maghreb.<sup>84</sup> Insurgent forces also demonstrated tactical flexibility. They initially fought conventional battles against ill-equipped, poorly trained Malian forces then resorted to guerrilla tactics against French and Africa Union forces.

Although France and several African nations assumed responsibility for fighting the insurgents in Mali, they required airlift and ISR assistance from the US.<sup>85</sup> The French request highlights an often-ignored aspect of irregular war, the role of airpower. France did not have enough strategic airlift to move their forces to Mali. In Mali, as in many other irregular wars, the ability to airlift units to remote locations and keep them supplied was decisive to French success.<sup>86</sup> Although close air support aircraft a role in the conflict, it was only during the early conventional stages. This is similar to US operations against the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001 and in Libya during Operation Odyssey Dawn in 2011. In both instances, the dominance of lethal airpower and ISR played a critical role in overall success. In irregular wars in general, and specifically in Mali, close air support was most appropriate for conventional battles and was not suitable during later small-unit, hit-and-run tactics.<sup>87</sup> Airlift was vital throughout the operation.

The US successfully supported French operations in Mali without having to become directly involved, but this may not always be an option. There are several different scenarios where the US may get drawn into existing conflicts. For instance, in December 2013 the US began evacuating officials and US citizens from South Sudan as the result of an ongoing civil war. During the evacuation, Sudanese rebels engaged the extraction force, wounding four Navy SEALs and damaging three aircraft. The AFRICOM commander responded by moving the US Marines' Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Crisis Response from Spain to Djibouti so it could respond to future incidents. Although the ongoing situation has not yet

resulted in direct, overt US engagement, it demonstrates a process of escalation that may eventually draw in US forces despite the intent to avoid the conflict.

Humanitarian assistance missions, disaster response, noncombatant emergency evacuations, peacekeeping, and military assistance missions all have the potential to escalate into armed conflicts that require the Army's response.<sup>88</sup> Though conventional attacks in these scenarios may occur, it seems unlikely that an irregular threat would choose to fight the US using conventional tactics. Even so, and as demonstrated in Mali, just because a war starts conventionally does not mean it will not become irregular. Descriptions of hybrid warfare also suggest future conflicts will contain concurrent elements of both. Combinations of irregular threats and conditions in the future operating environment point to highly complex scenarios that will challenge the US Army's ability to coordinate an effective response. The first step to coordinating a response is to ensure the Army has the capability to respond.

### **Preparing the Force**

*"Do all that you know, and try all that you don't: Not a chance must be wasted...tis a maxim tremendous, but trite: and you'd best be unpacking the things that you need to rig yourselves out for the fight." – Lewis Carroll*

Identifying problems caused by strategic inconsistency is an easier task than designing solutions constrained by declining force structures, decreasing budgets, and worn-out equipment. The best solutions should not ignore the reality of future irregular threats or focus exclusively on technologically advanced conventional combat. Recurring patterns within irregular warfare emerge upon close examination of the full history and operational context of these types of conflict. Sadly, few leaders make the effort to conduct a thorough examination. Regardless, ideas to address irregular threats already exist and merely require implementation.

To break the Army's large war paradigm and finally listen to history's rhyme, this paper recommends that the Army focus on professional military education, develop GPF irregular warfare units, emphasize security force assistance (SFA) in partnership with SOF, and prioritize assured mobility. These options are relatively inexpensive, rapidly implementable, and based on effective techniques for dealing with irregular threats. Education, organization, and mission recommendations require internal efforts by senior Army leadership; however, mobility recommendations require joint Army and Air Force collaboration. The recommendations below result from an understanding that irregular warfare forces must be well trained and led, properly organized, and mobile throughout the battle space in order to succeed. If the Army accomplishes these recommendations, it can adapt to any future specific context it may encounter.

*Education.* General Sir Frank Kitson is a British Army officer who participated in, and wrote about, irregular conflicts. He served throughout Britain's crumbling colonial empire with operational experiences including service in the Intelligence Branch during the Kenyan Mau Mau Rebellion, company command in Malaya fighting communist insurgents, planning operations in Oman, peacekeeping in Cyprus, and combating Irish separatists in Northern Ireland. Kitson's Kenyan experiences informed a book he wrote about gangs and pseudo-gangs, and he distilled lessons learned from his multiple campaigns into *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, and Peacekeeping*, which he released in 1971 while serving as a brigade commander in Northern Ireland. His writings and experience made Kitson one of Britain's foremost counterinsurgency experts, much as General David Petraeus would become thirty years later in the US. *Low Intensity Operations* discusses what the 1970s British Army should do to prepare for the future, but its recommendations for professional military education are applicable for the US Army today.

Kitson recommends focusing on the role of education and training to better prepare for irregular warfare. He identifies four relevant aspects of training and education to prepare for fighting insurgencies. Kitson believes soldiers must be taught about the nature of these operations, how to achieve civil-military unity of effort, how to conduct information gathering operations, and effective tactics, techniques, and procedures. Of these, Kitson says the most urgent requirement is to teach the correct methods of tactical information handling, and that military schools should spend more time teaching counterinsurgency.<sup>89</sup> While Kitson's recommendations focus on officer education, they apply equally well to non-commissioned officer (NCO) professional development.

The organizational and operational conditions faced by the 1970s British Army resemble what the US Army faces today. The British, and now the US, faced constrained budgets forcing reduced force structures, which created a situation where there was less room for error in preparing for future conventional and irregular conflict. The current US military, particularly the Army, must continue to teach and train its soldiers in irregular conflict even though national strategy seems intent on focusing on state-based adversaries. Kitson's argument for continuing to train and expand education still rings true – government predictions may be wrong and the likelihood of fighting another insurgency is indisputable.<sup>90</sup> Myths about the special nature of insurgencies seem to convince some senior leaders that fighting insurgencies is too hard. The US Army needs to remedy this. Kitson notes, “fighting subversion or insurgency is no more of a special subject than is the fighting of conventional war.”<sup>91</sup>

With declining budgets and force structures, the modern US Army must turn to professional military education (PME) to prepare soldiers for future irregular conflict. There is a need for the US military education system to expand irregular warfare instruction and make it a coequal

component of the typical conventional warfare curriculum in professional development courses. It is unacceptable that the US history of participation in irregular warfare and recent decade of insurgency have not brought about more than a superficial expansion of relevant education in the topic. For instance, The US Army Command and General Staff College still only offers a voluntary course in counterinsurgency. The yearlong Small Wars and Counterinsurgencies elective at the USAF Air Command and Staff College is the only one of its kind, at any level, in the US professional military education system. This is especially troublesome since irregular warfare represents half of the range of military operations for which the US Army is supposed to be fully prepared.

Much as Kitson prescribes, irregular warfare education should occur at each stage of an officer and NCO's professional military education. For officers, the Army should reintroduce the three-phased Basic Officer Leadership Course (BOLC) concept used until 2009. Army officers received pre-commissioning instruction during BOLC Phase I, followed by an eight-week Phase II where newly commissioned officers received training in basic soldier skills. After BOLC Phase II, officers went to branch-specific Phase III training for 15 weeks. This process created a training backlog and caused lieutenant shortages during the height of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, which caused the Army to change.<sup>92</sup> The Army should reinstitute the eight-week Phase II program since the declining operational tempo mitigates the risk of training backlogs. Four weeks should focus on basic soldier skills, with the remaining four weeks spent learning about irregular warfare. During the latter portion, officers should receive training in the history, theory, tactics, techniques, and procedures of irregular warfare. The officers could then go to branch-specific Phase III training where they would integrate knowledge of the full spectrum of

warfare within their technical specialties. NCOs should receive at least two weeks of similar irregular warfare instruction during their Warrior Leader Course.

During the Captain Career Course, officers should receive refresher training followed by another four weeks of higher-level irregular warfare training. Advanced training would introduce the basics of working with interagency representatives, non-governmental organizations, and the diplomatic, information, military, and economic approach used at the strategic level. NCOs attending the Advanced and Senior Leader Courses should receive similar instruction. Because of the nature of irregular warfare, introducing young captains and mid-grade NCOs to strategic-level concepts is an important step in irregular warfare PME. Majors should receive at least a three-month, semester-long course in the history, theory, tactics, techniques, and procedures of irregular warfare focusing on operational and strategic aspects. All joint planning exercises during intermediate level education should also contain irregular warfare planning aspects that require the same level of planning attention and detail devoted to conventional operations.

Senior officers and NCOs attending service war colleges or the Sergeant Major Academy should receive a yearlong course in the history, theory, tactics, techniques, and procedures of irregular warfare focusing on the national and military strategic level. The intent is that all levels of officer and NCO professional military education contain irregular warfare training in increasing duration and focused on relevant aspects for the level at which a leader will operate. Irregular warfare training must be mandatory, not simply an optional elective for interested soldiers, and all Army leaders must fully understand its concepts. The Army stopped teaching irregular warfare following the Vietnam War and suffered in Afghanistan and Iraq, because soldiers had to relearn under fire what they could have been taught in the classroom.



*Organization.* All necessary US Army capabilities to effectively fight in irregular warfare already exist. It makes sense to balance strategic reality with fiscal constraints and reorganize to address future irregular threats better. What the Army currently is a GPF force structure that does not require retraining for missions to address irregular adversaries. The current force structure is adapted for reactive, large-scale operations using precision and standoff weapons. The organization typically defines threats within a single country and plans to apply technology and conventional tactics against a hierarchical enemy. This approach works well for conventional threats, but the amount of reorganization and retraining required to prepare GPF units for irregular warfare may not be feasible in an expected future operating environment characterized by smaller forces and tight budgets. Most Army units should remain focused on conventional conflict, but some GPF units need to be ready to implement immediately effective irregular warfare tactics.

Maintaining a GPF irregular warfare capability will ensure the US Army remains responsive across the full spectrum of military operations. However, the US Army cannot afford to create specialized units capable of performing only one type of mission. This does not mean that certain units cannot focus on a particular subset of operations while maintaining the ability to perform others, in keeping with the mission tailoring concept described earlier. Refocusing some GPF units on irregular warfare will make the Army more flexible and better prepared to confront challenges in emerging, strategically important areas like Africa. From 1950 to 2010, the US used its armed forces in Africa 46 times, with 78% of those instances occurring since 1990. The majority of responses occurred in Central and West Africa to address irregular threats. Military missions in Africa continue to increase at an exponential rate, with two in the 1960s, six in the 1980s, and 18 during the 2000s.<sup>93</sup> This mission growth rate continues, and

there have been almost as many uses of the US armed forces in Africa between 2010 and 2013 as between 2000 and 2010. The exponential growth of missions in Africa and instability in the Middle East appear to require GPF forces to augment overstretched Army Special Forces (SF).

Major General Bill Hix, the deputy director of the Army Capabilities Integration Center, recently highlighted the need for the Army to become “leaner, more expeditionary, more responsive and able to deploy more rapidly.”<sup>94</sup> General Hix's comments belied a strategic focus on conventional conflict in places like Pakistan or North Korea. They were also a response to declining force structures driven by ongoing budget constraints.<sup>95</sup> Regardless, creating GPF irregular warfare units meets General Hix's intent. Events since the US Balkan interventions in the 1990s show the Army must be ready to address two concurrent operations. These missions will likely require units trained for combinations of conventional and irregular warfare, and may require response times that preclude pre-deployment retraining. By implementing a limited reorganization of its GPF, the US Army can develop a cost-effective solution that maintains GPF irregular warfighting units that compliment conventional ones. However, this solution should be organized within the constraints of an active duty force of 420,000 soldiers, since that appears to be the level at which forces reductions will end.<sup>96</sup>

In 2003, the Army began reorganizing to deploy by brigades instead of by divisions. The process of modularity standardized three types of brigade combat teams – armored, infantry, and Stryker. The reorganization and emphasis on brigade-level operations made the Army more deployable, versatile, and sustainable.<sup>97</sup> Modularity is an important concept and serves as the foundation for the limited reorganization recommended in this paper. Despite sequestration's ongoing effects, senior Army leaders like General Robert Cone, head of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), understand the need for forces capable of working with

partners and implementing lessons learned during the past decade of irregular conflict. General Cone also acknowledges ongoing debates about whether these forces should be separate or if existing brigade combat teams should perform the mission as one of several.<sup>98</sup>

This paper recommends assigning an irregular warfare mission to brigade combat teams and reorganizing them while retaining them within the GPF. Irregular Warfare Brigades (IWB) will be multi-role organizations within the GPF, and focused on maintaining higher levels of proficiency in missions along the irregular end of the spectrum of conflict. IWBs would primarily conduct distributed operations and possess regional expertise and language proficiency to allow units to operate in close contact with indigenous populations. These organizations would focus in basic training and tactics suitable for a mix of irregular, conventional, and stability operations, while implementing a proactive whole-of-government approach suitable for local contexts.

Creating IWBs would provide the US Army an ability to engage irregular threats within the overlapping areas of irregular, conventional, and stability operations without having to retrain conventional GPF units each time the Army faces an irregular conflict scenario. These units would also supplement Army SF in critical areas requiring a larger US presence. Proposed IWBs would be capable of conducting conventional operations up to the battalion level. This would ensure they remain available for larger conventional conflicts and do not become an additional strain on the Army's already declining force structure. IWBs must maintain higher levels of regional expertise and language proficiency, and should be proficient in the below-listed tasks as they relate to irregular warfare contexts:

Task	Operation Type	Defeat/Stability Mechanism
Counterinsurgency	Irregular Warfare (IW)	Dislocate
Foreign Internal Defense	IW	Control
Peacekeeping	Stability (SSTR)	Control

Humanitarian Assistance	SSTR	Influence
Raids	IW/Major Combat (MCO)	Destroy
Shaping Operations	IW/MCO/SSTR	Dislocate/Support
Civil-Military Operations	IW/MCO/SSTR	Support
Military Information Support	IW/MCO/SSTR	Isolate/Compel
Information Operations	IW/MCO/SSTR	Isolate/Influence
Intelligence Operations	IW/MCO/SSTR	Disintegrate
Security Force Assistance	IW/MCO/SSTR	Compel/Control
Stability Operations	IW/MCO/SSTR	Isolate/Support
Operational Support	IW/MCO/SSTR	Support

The 2014 QDR and *National Security Strategy* both comment on a need for the US military to work with partners to achieve regional security goals. The Army also understands this necessity and explains in TRADOC Pamphlet 525-8-5, *US Army Functional Concept for Engagement*, that partnership and special warfare (i.e., irregular warfare) activities are critical to future success.<sup>99</sup> Even though these actions imply regional and language expertise to work effectively with partners, the above documents do not address how to satisfy this need. Regionally aligning IWBs will develop regional expertise through frequent deployment within their assigned regions; however, language training is a more difficult proposition.

The Army will not likely be able to afford language training for all IWB soldiers as it does for Special Forces members. Additionally, many GPF soldiers may not have the aptitude to learn languages, especially some of the more difficult languages. The first solution to these problems is to accept that not all IWB soldiers will possess language proficiency. Second, the Army should incentivize soldiers to learn languages at little or no cost to the Army. One way to incentivize individual learning is to tie future promotions to language ability. Another option is to coordinate with community colleges located near military bases to offer needed languages, and soldiers could use available tuition assistance programs to take the classes. For officers, the Army should expect that all recipients of Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) scholarships complete a language requirement in one of a select group of operationally relevant languages as

a condition of commissioning. This places the burden on future officers to learn a language, and it ensures that 70% of incoming officers (the proportion of Army officers commissioned through ROTC) have language skills. Third, the Army should focus on identifying soldiers with language aptitude or existing proficiency then provide them additional training at the Defense Language Institute. The key to developing language proficiency within IWBs is to focus on the junior soldier and non-commissioned officer levels. At this level, soldiers have longevity within units and are most likely to interact with host nation forces and local populations during deployments.

The Army started demobilizing ten brigade combat teams in 2013 and will have 12 armored, 14 infantry, and 7 Stryker brigades by Fiscal Year 2017.<sup>100</sup> Each of the remaining brigades will have three armor or infantry battalions, one battalion each of field artillery, cavalry, engineer, and logistics support, and one company each of signal, military police, and military intelligence. Armored divisions currently contain either all armored brigades (i.e., 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division) or a mix of armor, infantry, and Stryker brigades (i.e., 1<sup>st</sup> Armored and 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions). This appears balanced and more deployable, but it dilutes striking power necessary during major combat operations. This paper recommends reorganizing all but one of the Army's armored divisions so each contains two armored brigades and one Stryker brigade. The remaining armored division (i.e., 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division) should serve as the US Army reserve for major combat operations. Light infantry divisions (i.e., 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, and 101<sup>st</sup> Air Assault Division) contain a mix of light infantry, airborne, and air assault brigades suitable in their current configuration for irregular or conventional combat. Separate brigade combat teams (i.e., 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade, 1/2<sup>nd</sup>, 3/25<sup>th</sup>, 4/25<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Regiments) should retain their current configurations and serve as a reserve for major combat or irregular

operations, depending on the need. This recommendation would change the ratio of brigades to 12 armored, 12 infantry, and 9 Stryker while maintaining an ability to support full spectrum operations.

In conjunction with this reorganization, the Army should designate one infantry or Stryker brigade combat team per division as an IWB primarily focused on conducting irregular warfare operations. As mentioned, IWB subordinate units should retain the capability to participate in major combat operations, but the entire brigade could also serve as an irregular force for countering hybrid threats. Designating one IWB per division would provide five infantry and five Stryker brigades available for irregular or stability operations. The remaining brigades would focus on training for major combat operations against conventional threats. This approach devotes less than one third of available GPF brigade combat teams to irregular warfare, while retaining them in formations available for major combat operations, if needed. However, maintaining IWBs would help address the threat of hybrid warfare discussed earlier. Hybrid threats' challenge and complexity comes from their dynamic combination of conventional and irregular elements that force commanders to decide between concentration at the expense of area control, or dispersion that risks isolated units being attacked by conventional forces. IWBs would have the ability to disperse while retaining sufficient capacity to confront conventional threats. The brigades would also allow joint task force commanders to keep conventional units concentrated for maximum effectiveness.

From a maneuver battalion standpoint, 69 of 95 battalions (73%) would remain focused on major combat; however, IWB battalions should be further reorganized. This paper proposes that battalions become the basic building block for all GPF irregular warfare units, much like the current British Army system of battle groups or US Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU). The

British battle group concept emphasizes fighting at the battalion and regiment levels, whereas the US Army, lacking a regimental echelon, organizes by brigades. British battle groups also typically remain task organized whereas the US Army only task organizes during training or deployments. The exception to the normal pattern of Army task organization is Combined Arms Battalions (CAB) in armored brigade combat teams. These multi-functional battalions maintain a mix of armor and infantry units supported by organic engineers, artillery, scouts, and snipers.<sup>101</sup> CABs can be a model for IWBs, but the Army should eventually incorporate aviation assets to make IWBs more closely resemble MEUs.

Each identified IWB should contain four to six modular battalions. Irregular Warfare Battalions should contain three infantry companies, an engineer company, artillery, scout, signal, intelligence and sniper platoons, as well as a logistics and mobility support companies. When massed as a battalion, these units would have combat power similar to other maneuver battalions, but modularity would support disaggregating IWB battalions into smaller elements capable of covering wider areas. The ability to disperse and conduct relatively self-sufficient, distributed operations would allow employment of IWBs over a larger area. Ultimately, the exact size of the units within a modular Irregular Warfare Battalion is less important than adhering to the concept of self-sufficiency and ability to conduct distributed operations in austere environments. The 2013 French experience in Mali suggests that brigade and battalion-level employment of IWBs will be effective in future situations.

During 2013 French operations in Mali, a brigade-size force, consisting of three battalion task forces working with the Malian military, reestablished control of enemy-occupied territory roughly the size of Afghanistan. This suggests that maintaining an IWB within each division would be enough for the US Army to handle several concurrent situations like Mali. This is



important since the QDR emphasizes that the US must be able to deter aggression in more than one theater of operation.<sup>102</sup> Designating an IWB for a particular region would allow them to conduct training with elements from the US Army SF group responsible for the area to prepare for comprehensive and coordinated training missions. During shaping operations, where there is less emphasis on operations and more on training, a single modular battalion would likely be enough to conduct in-country training missions in partnership with special operations forces. In countries like Mali, with an Army of approximately 7,000 soldiers, a modular battalion with SOF support would likely be enough to partner with almost the entire host nation's ground forces. The combination of GPF and SOF units also facilitates a range of training from basic to advanced skills. This demonstrates a significant advantage of creating IWBs with modular battalions. Doing so allows the Army to conduct missions with a small force commitment and operational footprint while maximizing the level of partnership with host nation forces.

*Mission.* During peacetime, the IWBs described above should focus on conducting internal defense and development (IDAD) programs. These types of programs focus on building viable institutions (political, military, social, and economic) to defeat threats by eliminating the conditions that created lawlessness.<sup>103</sup> IDAD programs must balance the four aspects mentioned above, but security force assistance (SFA) and foreign internal defense (FID) operations develop host nation forces to improve security institutions. IWBs should partner with Army SF or other SOF elements in SFA and FID operations. SFA "is unified action to generate, employ, and sustain local, host nation, or regional security forces in support of a legitimate authority."<sup>104</sup> FID is "the participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency."<sup>105</sup> SFA and FID are distinct, but related,



missions. US law establishes the foundation of FID, which uses all instruments of national power to support foreign governments facing internal threats. SFA is often the military component of FID; however, SFA focuses on training foreign security forces to confront external threats and serve in international coalitions. SFA and FID require similar advisory skills.<sup>106</sup>

Army regional alignment efforts will compliment SFA and FID efforts, and conducting these missions will help achieve regional alignment's intent to develop cultural knowledge and area expertise. An added benefit of IWBs conducting SFA will be the ongoing integration of GPF and SOF to help institutionalize relationships and procedures developed during the past decade of war. Historically, Army SF conducted FID, and GPF units assumed more prominent roles during large-scale or long duration SFA operations. American operations in Central America during the 1980s illustrate a classic example SF-led FID, while recent missions in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrate the GPF's role in SFA. However, the Army needs to improve the GPF's ability to conduct SFA or participate in FID by reducing the ad hoc nature of these operations. Establishing IWBs assigned responsibility for SFA/FID should help.

Army GPF has extensive SFA and FID experience dating back to the Spanish-American War, with the largest of these operations occurring during the US wars in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. These missions were also the most difficult because of the lack of institutional support and unity of effort.<sup>107</sup> Large-scale efforts typically diverted sizable numbers of ill-prepared GPF soldiers to perform advisory duties for which they were be poorly suited. Therefore, the best way to improve the ability of GPF to conduct SFA or FID is to institutionalize the training and support necessary to develop quality advisors. Creating and training IWBs achieves a large part of this objective. It institutionalizes the SFA role within designated brigades and ensures unity of effort by partnering the regionally aligned units with the

SF group responsible for the same region. Another way to improve the ability of GPF to perform SFA is to track personnel training and classify all soldiers according to a three-tiered system that notes whether a soldier is fully trained for SFA activities, possesses certain required skills to support SFA missions, or is only a generalized soldier available for use during large-scale expansion.<sup>108</sup>

Using GPF for SFA missions does have some potential issues. First, not all countries or regions may be appropriate for employment of GPF. The risk and character of an operational area should determine whether GPF are the correct asset to use. Additionally, internal political situations within a partner nation may preclude using GPF forces because of their visibility and overt sign of US support. In these instances, SOF will continue to be more suitable for conducting SFA. Second, increasing the frequency of SFA missions may require mobilizing elements of the Army Reserves or National Guard that have critical capabilities. Certain skills, like those in Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations units, reside mainly in the Army Reserves. The Army may need to rebalance the distribution of these skills among the active and reserve components or prepare critical reserve formations for more frequent deployment. This may affect recruiting and retention within critical fields. Third, the ability to conduct SFA and FID depends on the importance and value of a partner to US interests in a region, level of external and internal threats, and the capability of host nation forces. These factors change over time and impact the suitability of GPF.<sup>109</sup> A potential partner must have sufficient security value and threat level to warrant the necessary expense and effort to use GPF in SFA. Lastly, using GPF to conduct frequent SFA missions reduces the number of available forces to respond to emerging threats or contingencies, which will remain an issue if the Army continues to downsize. This can be mitigated by reducing SFA mission to those in the most vital regions.

The Army should focus on conducting SFA operations during the current transition from two wars while the nation regains its footing and strategic focus. National security cannot afford to wait for the next threat to reveal itself, nor can the US only focus on the types of threats it prefers to confront. The Army should actively engage with partners around the world to mitigate security risks and retain critical irregular warfare competencies. SFA fits within the framework established in the *Nation Security Strategy* by building partner security capacity to mitigate risks from failed states or terrorist safe havens. The strategy states, “the United States must improve its capability to strengthen the security of states at risk of conflict and violence. We will undertake long-term, sustained efforts to strengthen the capacity of security forces to guarantee internal security...and promote regional security.”<sup>110</sup> It then explains that strengthening security capacity “requires investing now in the capable partners of the future”, particularly in at-risk or strategically important areas.<sup>111</sup> Part of that investment should be in organizing IWBs focused on SFA missions in vital regions.

Since the goal of SFA is to build long-term host nation capacity, the use of IWBs to conduct these missions should focus on tasks to organize, train, equip, build, and advise to develop host nation forces. Of the three security force functions – executive, generating, and operating – the recommendations provided earlier best support the generating and operating functions. IWBs would be able to support a range of operations from basic soldier training, COIN, combined arms operations, sustainment, and intelligence. The following chart shows the range of training, functions, and levels of SFA engagement in operations short of war:

Echelon	Approach	Function	Sample Activities
Brigade	Indirect; Direct (non-combat); Major Combat	Executive; Generating; Operating	Intelligence; Info Ops; Logistics; Combat
Battalion	Indirect; Direct (non-combat);	Generating; Operating	Training; Psychological Ops; Medical; Commo;
Company	Indirect	Generating	Force Protection

The intent is to keep the level of peacetime engagement as small and indirect as possible. To facilitate unity of effort and primacy of political goals, IWB employment should be subordinate to the Department of State (DOS). The Chief of Mission (COM) within a host nation would have operational control (OPCON) of an IWB in consultation with the Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC). The GCC would maintain administrative responsibility, coordinate resources, and serve as the point of contact for military matters within a region. However, the DOS Country Team, led by the COM, would recommend the size of required forces, as well as determine their employment within the host nation.

Providing the Chief of Mission OPCON of Irregular Warfare Brigades operating in a host nation differs from current practices. Today, the GCC typically forms a joint task force (JTF) to conduct long-term SFA. Although the JTF commander coordinates efforts with the COM, the GCC is overall in charge. Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa exemplifies this pattern. A flaw in this approach is that it achieves unity of command by sacrificing unity of effort and full political control of military forces operating within a country. Because of the highly political nature of SFA and irregular warfare, military units operating in a host nation must be under the direct control of the COM to ensure military measures best support local political contexts. A potential issue with this approach is that a regional SFA mission spanning more than one nation may suffer from a lack of unity of effort. This occurred during the Vietnam War when SFA suffered from divergent goals held by the COMs and military commanders in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. However, the modern GCC construct mitigates this by providing an umbrella organization with responsibility to plan and coordinate with all countries within a region, led by a commander with direct access to the US President.

The Army's plan for regionally aligning its forces should help facilitate effective SFA. It also provides an opportunity to test the IWB construct. The concept of regional alignment arose from lessons learned during the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, where the Army learned the importance of leveraging local knowledge and area expertise. The goal is to align all units not assigned to a specific mission like South Korea or Afghanistan, and have them capable of deploying as teams of varying size.<sup>112</sup> Overall, the intent is to focus units on specific geographic areas to maximize training opportunities and develop broad-based local relationships and knowledge. Although not explicitly stated, regional alignment facilitates language training and proficiency by indicating which languages are most needed within the force, as well as providing an opportunity for soldiers to develop and improve their proficiency during operations. Although all brigades will be regionally aligned, IWBs will be well-suited for conducting missions in remote locations or with a higher level of irregular threat. This concept mirrors US SOF or the French Army, which both leverage cultural knowledge and area expertise to magnify the effect of small, rapidly deployable forces. For example, the French Army was able to rapidly plan operations in partnership with Malian forces, and encourage other African nations to provide peacekeepers, in part, because of France's long-term regional engagement.<sup>113</sup>

Although GPF conducted large-scale SFA missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, SOF remain the trained experts. Using GPF IWBs to conduct SFA implies greater collaboration with SOF units. This is particularly important in the current fiscal environment to avoid competition for scarce resources. US Code designated FID as a SOF responsibility and the Department of Defense designated Special Operations Command as the joint proponent for SFA. While SOF will likely remain the lead proponent, the role of SFA described in the *National Security Strategy* suggests

GPF will play a larger role to offset the numerical limitations of SOF forces. Therefore, determining the character of the SOF/GPF relationship is important.

The character of the SOF/GPF relationship must be determined to ensure SFA and FID occurs at the proper level and trains the right elements of a host nation's security forces. Traditionally, SOF divides itself into two groups. Black SOF, like elements within the Joint Special Operations Command, focuses on direct action and special reconnaissance. White SOF, like Army SF, conducts FID and other indirect activities. Although SOF is responsible for FID operations, the community has mixed attitudes about when and at what level of effort it should engage. Conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq emphasized direct action and increasingly used white SOF in black roles. Rather than training host nation security forces in a non-kinetic, indirect role, Army SF predominantly participated in kinetic, counterterror roles against high value targets. This resulted in GPF forces taking the lead on training host nation security forces, a role for which they were initially unprepared. Some civilian leaders advocate for a balanced emphasis on FID and direct action activities, but the special operations community wants to focus on direct action and prefers to engage in unconventional warfare.<sup>114</sup> Regardless, the need to conduct large-scale, long-term FID in at least 20 high-priority countries, and periodic training and exercises in 20-40 more, means GPF forces in all services, particularly the Army and Air Force, need to work with SOF. Army and Air Force GPF must embrace SFA and FID as future core missions.<sup>115</sup>

Although SOF are specially selected and trained to conduct SFA, there are not enough of them to support large-scale missions. SOF leaders also prefer to use them to train other SOF forces rather than basic training for GPF units.<sup>116</sup> Based on this preference, the Army should task each of the proposed IWBs as the primary units responsible for conducting SFA in

particular geographic regions, much like Army SF units. Since each IWB would be regionally aligned, it would develop a similar level of cultural knowledge to assist in its partnership and training with host nation forces. The brigades should also be partnered with the Army SF group that has responsibility for the particular region. For instance, an IWB aligned to AFRICOM would partner with the 10<sup>th</sup> SF Group which has responsibility for the region. The units would work together as needed and tailor their efforts for a particular country. Whereas SOF would focus on FID missions against internal threats, IWBs should conduct SFA to build partner capacity to defend against external threats. Depending on the particular operating context, SOF and IWBs could alternate responsibility for leading missions. If a country required more SOF for FID, an IWB could support the mission with extra manpower or logistics, while SOF could provide intelligence, human network expertise, or host nation liaison to an IWB conducting a large-scale SFA mission.

In a country like Mali, SOF would conduct FID with Malian SOF to target insurgents and AQIM. An IWB would conduct SFA with the Malian Army, which would then be better prepared to secure Mali's borders against outside aggression like that launched by the Tuaregs. SOF would also benefit from the partnership with an IWB by receiving a more robust sustainment package and additional security forces to augment limited assets. IWBs would benefit from up-to-date intelligence and close coordination with SOF to plan and conduct SFA training in an ever-evolving security context. While smaller footprint SOF conducted FID in austere, high-risk locations in Mali's northern regions, an IWB would occupy and secure critical infrastructure to facilitate force and logistics flow. The IWB would also help contain the spread of an insurgency. The intent is to facilitate partnership between SOF and GPF while providing

SFA to host nation security forces. Regionally aligned, culturally attuned forces best perform this role, and using IWBs in partnership with SOF to perform this mission achieves this.

*Mobility.* Airpower is an essential component of modern operations and decisive in land operations. Strike, ISR, close air support, medical evacuation, space, and cyber support are critical airpower elements that support US joint operations. However, airlift may be the most decisive element of airpower in the future operating environment. Once the US identifies a threat and decides to engage, it must be able to respond with the necessary forces and equipment. Inter-theater and intra-theater mobility is a critical component of America's ability to respond to future irregular threats. Existing airlift assets are only marginally suitable for most operations, and the 2014 QDR suggests this may change for the worse. These capabilities are slowly eroding despite their absolute necessity and proven value. The fact that the US is withdrawing from many of its forward-positioned bases exacerbates this problem and makes power-projection more difficult. If the Army is unable to station troops and equipment closer to likely hot spots, airlift support from the USAF will be an operational constraint.

US operations around the world, British and French colonial experiences in Africa, and the recent decade of COIN campaigns demonstrate airlift's vital role in irregular warfare.<sup>117</sup> Even though the *National Security Strategy* does not require the military to respond simultaneously to two major wars, it does require the ability to fight one war, contain another, and respond to humanitarian crises. This means the military needs to deploy rapidly across continents and oceans. Strategic air mobility assets, like the C-17 Globemaster and C-5 Galaxy, are the linchpin of rapid force projection and the Army's ability to respond to contingencies.<sup>118</sup> However, the Air Force currently has less than 300 of these aircraft.<sup>119</sup> This is insufficient given strategic airlift limitations such as the mission readiness of available aircraft, amount of cargo capacity per day,



and air base infrastructure.<sup>120</sup> The early stages of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan highlight this point.

Strategic airlift issues arose almost immediately after OEF started. There were not enough aircraft available and theater air bases lacked sufficient infrastructure to support airlift operations. Airfields required repair or improvements to support operations and, since there were not enough theater bases, intermediate air bases from as far away as Spain and Guam were used and quickly overloaded. Additionally, diplomatic over-flight restrictions and hostile ground fire delayed operations, which further reduced airlift throughput.<sup>121</sup> The US should expect to face similar issues if it has to operate in places like Mali. As previously mentioned, Mali only has 27 airports, eight of which are paved. Of the eight paved airfields, only three have the ability to support instrument approach procedures, one can accommodate C-5s, and only four can handle smaller C-17s. During the 2013 uprising in northern Mali, two of the four airfields capable of supporting C-17s were in rebel-controlled territory. Only 16 of the remaining unpaved airfields can support tactical airlift operations conducted with C-130s, and six of those were in rebel territory. Mali is actually less challenging than several other countries in the region, which have less than ten airfields and none of which can handle US airlift assets larger than a C-130 Hercules inter-theater cargo aircraft.

The situation in Mali and Sub-Saharan Africa points to a need for more tactical, intra-theater airlift assets since most locations cannot support larger strategic airlift aircraft. Tactical airlift aircraft, like the C-130, played a critical role in moving and resupplying troops in Afghanistan and Iraq over the past decade. It would have been invaluable to French forces recently operating in Mali. Although USAF C-17s flew French forces to Mali, the forces had to travel almost 500 miles by land to reach insurgent-held territory. This slowed operations because the French had

to secure long lines of communication to support the combined advance. To move a company of infantry and supporting equipment 200 kilometers requires one C-17 sortie, four C-130 sorties, or 12 CH-47 Chinook helicopter sorties.<sup>122</sup> The C-130 is clearly the most efficient given the strategic role of the C-17 and limited range and lift of the CH-47. However, the Air Force is actively considering reducing the number of its C-130 squadrons because they deem them unnecessary for the operating environment the USAF expects.<sup>123</sup> The USAF envisions meeting high-tech adversaries like China in a conventional fight, so it mistakenly sees little need for tactical airlift.

The Army must engage USAF leaders to ensure retention of enough tactical airlift to respond to contingencies in places like Mali, Sudan, or Somalia, especially since the QDR plans to cut airlift assets to save money for acquiring fifth-generation fighters. Air Force leaders may resist the acquisition of airlift over attack assets but, as the joint provider of airpower, it has an obligation to retain sufficient capacity to meet the Army's needs. It may also be uncomfortable for the Army to make a strong case to the Air Force when the Army is going through organizational, manning, and equipping challenges. Regardless, the Army must take the lead in advocating for traditional roles and bringing attention to the fact that the USAF is not proactively planning. As General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently wrote, "We need to reassess what capabilities we need most, rethink how we develop and aggregate the Joint Force, and reconsider how we fight together."<sup>124</sup> To accomplish this goal, the Army must recognize the importance of airlift, to include investing in additional heavy-lift helicopter like the CH-47. It must also pay more attention to the fact that the Army is strategically vulnerable without adequate airlift support. Leaders like Army Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno recognize the need for lighter, expeditionary forces, but his comments do not hint at an

understanding that the Army's expeditionary capability is completely dependent on Air Force airlift assets.<sup>125</sup>

Besides retaining sufficient airlift, the Army needs to engage USAF leaders and convince them to reinvigorate their role in FID. Aviation FID, or FID-A, is essential in places like Mali, since it facilitates air and ground operations while improving the host nation's infrastructure. FID-A missions are an important enabler for building host nation security capacity, because airpower plays a critical role in military, law enforcement, and civilian roles. Despite its importance, long record of historical success in places like the Philippines and El Salvador, and established doctrine, the Air Force under-supports and deemphasizes FID-A. The 2014 QDR reflects a historical pattern of the USAF deemphasizing missions like airlift and FID-A to support acquisition of more fighters and bombers – whether needed or not. This is an institutional error with strategic consequences, since the USAF is surrendering the initiative and ability to influence events in critical regions before situations devolve or require a large-scale response. FID-A may have more strategic value than fighters or bombers. It provides policy makers with options before events get out of hand or demand kinetic responses. The Army must help Air Force and civilian leaders realize this fact.

The USAF has less than 200 personnel qualified to conduct FID-A, and the 6<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron (SOS) is the Air Force's only unit capable of conducting the mission. FID-A facilitates power projection and augments mobility, so it should be addressed as a mobility issue. The Air Force should expand the 6<sup>th</sup> SOS to at least a four-squadron group led by a colonel. Each of the squadrons should have identical capabilities for supporting FID-A missions, even if the squadrons focus on training with different aircraft suitable for their area of operations. Each squadron should also be regionally aligned so it can specialize on the needs of a particular

region. Four squadrons would adequately support regional alignment because US Northern and European Commands do not have sufficient FID-A requirements to justify creating new squadrons. Additionally, each of the proposed squadrons should be partnered with the IWBs and Army SF groups responsible for the same region, so all the organizations can share knowledge, conduct training, and create unity of effort for FID within a region. The Air Force's alignment of Special Tactics with Army SF units can serve as a model for the type of partnerships described above. The Malian example demonstrates a clear need for extensive FID-A operations to achieve national security objectives and suggests how FID-A would complement Army SFA operations. The Army cannot control what the Air Force does, but it can sound the alarm and make it clear to civilian leaders that the Army's future success relies upon successful Air Force mobility and FID-A operations.

### **Conclusion**

*If you don't like change, you're going to like irrelevance even less – General Eric Shinseki*

The Army must retain and enhance its irregular warfare capabilities despite shrinking budgets, declining force structures, and the end of major military involvement in Afghanistan. It cannot afford to ignore or disavow more than a decade of irregular warfare experience like it did after the Vietnam War. The Army may not be able to purchase new equipment or retain large numbers of personnel, but it must develop innovative ways to ensure hard-won lessons and skills do not atrophy. Army leaders have a strategic opportunity to posture the organization for success on future battlefields by preparing now for likely conflict scenarios. The Army expended blood and treasure relearning lessons taught in previous irregular wars, including the indispensable value of the human element in adapting to changing battlefield conditions.

Most US military interventions have been, and will continue to be, irregular conflicts that require general purpose forces to take the lead or support special operations forces conducting unified land operations. The *National Security Strategy*, *Quadrennial Defense Review*, and some military leaders may prefer to focus on state-based challenges in Asia, but the Army must not ignore rising irregular challenges in Africa, the Middle East, and South America. The Army cannot afford to organize, train, and equip for a fight that may never come, or at least not come in predictable ways. It must anticipate and prepare for the recurrence of irregular wars by retaining sufficient capacity to address irregular threats, while ensuring the Army can defeat enemies in major combat operations. Expanding irregular warfare instruction during all commissioned and non-commissioned officer professional military education courses, organizing Irregular Warfare Brigades within each division, conducting extensive security force assistance operations under the auspices of regional alignment, and working with the US Air Force to increase their airlift and FID-A capacity will help the Army be better prepared for the irregular wars that are undoubtedly just over the horizon.

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